

VARIETY

---

Posted: Sun., Nov. 24, 2002, 12:52pm PT

Anonymously Yours

(Docu)

An Aerial Production. Produced, directed by Gayle Ferraro.

---

By LAEL LOEWENSTEIN

---

Filmed in Southeast Asia under incalculably trying circumstances, "Anonymously Yours" is a blistering and provocative docu that exposes the world of Burmese sex trafficking with shocking intimacy. Though undeniably painful to watch, the film is must-see viewing for anyone interested in human rights. Docu would find a suitable home on PBS or a cable outlet such as CNN, where it would be a worthy companion piece to last year's "Beneath the Veil."

Though not as much of a hot-button issue as Saira Shah's expose on the struggles of Afghani women under the Taliban regime, this piece by Gayle Ferraro is similarly compelling. With the help of a Burmese social worker, Ferraro gained access to several young women who had been sold into prostitution, and who would speak only on condition of anonymity. Their stories are horrifying, none more so than that of "ZuZu," a seemingly innocent 16-year-old who was raped as a child and, like so many other girls, sold into prostitution to pay her family's debts. The details are staggering: Zuzu recalls being forced to have sex with several men at a time, narrowly escaping a leech farm, and suffering a violently induced abortion, which "made everyone happy because then I could go back to work."

The other women's tales are equally riveting, as is the candor with which they reveal themselves -- especially given the risks they took in speaking to Ferraro. Banned from filming by the military government, Ferraro and her minimal crew had to shoot surreptitiously and smuggle their tapes out of the country through an acquaintance. Given prostitution's value to Burmese economy, little is likely to change. "Anonymously Yours" leaves the viewer feeling outraged but helpless: At the very least, it could stimulate a much-needed dialogue.

Camera (color, digital video), Jill Tufts; edited by Keiko Deguschi; music, Claudio Ragazzi; sound (Dolby SR) Geof Thurber. Reviewed at AFI Film Festival, L.A., Nov. 10, 2002. Running time: 87 MIN.